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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 001975

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [YM](#) [SU](#) [EH](#) [COUNTER TERRORISM](#) [MARITIME SECURITY](#)

SUBJECT: YEMEN SEEKS INCREASED COOPERATION WITH HOA TO  
DECREASE TERRORISM

REF: SANAA 1814

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull, for Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. This is an action request. See paragraph 10.

2. (c) Summary: Commander of the U.S. Combined Joint Task Force for the Horn of Africa (CJTTF-HOA), General Maston Robeson, met with the Yemeni Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs and Interior on August 4 to discuss American and Yemeni policy objectives in the Horn of Africa (HOA). The ministers' comments largely focused on maritime security, the need to promote stability in Somalia and counter-terrorism cooperation, and were consistent with press reports of a ROYG campaign to increase cooperation in the Horn of Africa and the formation of a Yemen-Ethiopia-Sudan tripartite (reftel). Yemeni officials, concerned that terrorists are taking advantage of the transit routes used by the many immigrants landing on Yemen's unguarded coasts, are working with the U.S. to establish a fully functioning Coast Guard and to increase border security. They anticipate regional cooperation will help increase domestic stability in HOA countries which will result in decreased migrant flows and stem some of the flow of terrorism. End summary.

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Increased Border Security Required to Staunch  
Migrant/Terrorist Flow  
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3. (c) On August 4, General Robeson met with Minister of Defense Abdullah Ali Aliawa, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abubaker Abdullah al-Qirbi, and Minister of Interior Rashad Mohammad Al-Alimi to discuss Yemen's role in increasing HOA cooperation in the fight against terror. All three ministers conveyed similar messages. With vast coastlines and porous borders with Saudi and Oman, border security remains an area of ROYG concern. Since the resolution of border demarcation issues with Saudi Arabia, ROYG has turned its attention to maritime security along the southern and western coasts. There is specific concern about the Gulf of Aden and the "Bab al-Mandeb" Straits. Chief of Staff Gassimi, who attended Robeson's meeting with the Defense Minister, believes the same vessels taking advantage of Yemen's unguarded coasts to smuggle people, goods, and possibly weapons, may be involved in the "bi-directional flow of terror across the Red Sea."

4. (c) The ROYG is working with the U.S. to establish a fully functional Coast Guard by 2006, and holds monthly security meetings between the Ministries of Interior, Transportation, and other security officials to study ways to improve border security. However, Minister of Defense Alaiwa said, "ROYG lacks the tools necessary to do more" including a radar system. Robeson asked all three ministries if ROYG would be interested in "Safe Skies", a program designed to create region-wide radar coverage by increasing the level of radar technology at HOA airports. FM Qirbi and Minister Alaiwa agreed to consider the program and requested additional information. The Minister of Interior deferred to Ministry of Defense.

5. (c) The Defense Minister also told Robeson that Yemen has good relations with Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia, but relations between Yemen and Eritrea remain strained (due in part to the dispute over the Hanish Islands), and that there is no central government in Somalia with whom the ROYG can work. He noted that Yemen is making overtures to increase economic, political, and security cooperation among HOA countries through the recent creation of a tripartite (Yemen, Ethiopia, and Sudan) commission and an invitation to other countries in the region with similar "principles and objectives" to join its efforts (reftel). The ROYG is considering expanding the multilateral partnership to include Kenya, Tanzania, and/or Djibouti. (Comment: This "open" invitation has been met with skepticism by Eritrean officials in Sana'a, who maintain that the sole purpose of the tripartite is to ensure Eritrea's isolation. End comment.)

6. (c) Foreign Minister Qirbi called on General Robeson and the U.S. to facilitate greater regional cooperation to bring stability and security to HOA, thereby stanching the continuous flow of migrants to Yemen. Robeson noted that the U.S. is already conducting training in Yemen, Eritrea, and Djibouti to provide local forces with the necessary skills to improve maritime security, and training in Sudan is scheduled

to start soon. He suggested that a regional exercise would be useful in promoting Yemen's efforts to increase maritime security.

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Local Conflict Contributes to Regional Instability -  
Solving Somalia  
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17. (c) To succeed in the war on terror, Minister Qirbi believes the U.S. must do more to solve regional conflicts -- there is no government in Somalia, the Sudanese government is overwhelmed, and Ethiopia and Eritrea are still dealing with a border issue. Qirbi said strong central governments need to be established, and domestic issues must be dealt with impartially and politically in order to achieve a comprehensive solution.

18. (c) According the ministers, the ROYG,s goal in Somalia is to reduce external influences on internal Somali issues (for example, interference from Ethiopia and Eritrea) and to promote the establishment of a strong central government. Chief of Staff Gassimi expressed interest in the U.S. position on Somalia, asking which side the U.S. will recognize, and alluded to a failed ROYG attempt at mediation. Undeterred by previous difficulties, the Minister of Interior said Yemen is preparing to send ROYG officials to Somalia in the near future as there are currently no Yemeni officials on the ground.

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Counter-terrorism Cooperation  
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19. (c) The ministers were also united in their view that a lack of counter-terrorism cooperation makes HOA an attractive target for terrorists interested in exploiting its unguarded transit routes. General Robeson was told in his meetings that President Saleh has raised this issue with Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya but, with the exception of the new tripartite venture, there is currently no multilateral initiative to address the issue.

110. (c) Comment: ROYG officials responded well to Robeson's preliminary proposals for areas of future U.S.-Yemen cooperation and U.S.-HOA cooperation that might include Yemen. They spoke about Yemen's approach to HOA and the reasons more regional cooperation is necessary with unexpected candor, and provided unusually detailed responses to General Robeson's questions. The Yemen-Ethiopia-Sudan tripartite is evidence of HOA multilateralism at work and may prove the basis for a regional security initiative capable of deterring terrorist operations. Having said this, the effort is still in its infancy and the details of how such a consortium might operate and its effectiveness are untested. Post will continue to engage with the host government and HOA representatives in Yemen to seek opportunities to influence the process in such a way that it promotes U.S. interests in regional stability. Post also welcomes additional guidance and information from the Department or CENTCOM on U.S. programs in the HOA that could be expanded to include Yemen, specifically the "Safe Ships" initiative. End comment.

111. (u) Minimize considered.  
HULL